

NEWS

Hurricane Georges Hits Puerto Rico

by Ileana Pabon, Computer Specialist, Puerto Rico State Office

On September 21, an unwelcomed visitor toured our island. For 15 hours, Hurricane Georges tore through Puerto Rico, bringing up to 28 inches of rainfall, winds of up to 110 mph, and damaging everything in its path.

Georges, the biggest hurricane to pass through Puerto Rico in 70 years, claimed seven lives and caused uncounted injuries. It also damaged or destroyed many homes and blocked roads with downed trees and electric poles. Although utility companies are responding quickly, many towns and FSA field offices, flooded by raging rivers, still have no electricity or drinking water.

Altogether, the hurricane left behind total damages of \$1.9 billion, including more than \$330 million in crop and livestock losses. Farmers here are reeling from an 80 percent loss to all crops, including coffee, bananas, and plantains, in addition to poultry and dairy losses. This year's harvest was lost almost entirely, and it could take months, or years in some cases, to return to full harvest. Many farmers also must contend with impeded access to farms, flooded processing plants, and impaired irrigation and drainage systems. Currently, farmers are repairing roads and working to restore their land, including clearing debris and applying fertilizer.

The town of Utuado, where the USDA Service Center is located, was one of the hardest hit, suffering major flooding. At the Service Center, all the roof tiling fell, and many windows were



An estimated 55 percent of Puerto Rico's coffee crop (above) and 90 percent of plantains (right) and bananas have been lost.

blown out. Rain poured through, flooding the facilities and destroying most of the furniture and equipment. "This experience has been the worst I've lived through — worse than Hurricane Hugo," says Alba Rivera, Ag Loan Technician. Three FSA employees lost their homes and their contents, but fortunately, did not sustain physical injuries.

Although this disaster by its magnitude was the worst in Puerto Rico's history, without hesitation our fighting spirit arose. So immediately after Georges left and continued his destructive route to the nearby Dominican Republic, FSA employees jumped in to help devastated farmers and producers, whose total losses were less than



See HURRICANE, continued on page 3

ADMINISTRATOR'S COLUMN

A Banner Year for SDA Loans

As Administrator, one of my top priorities has been improving our loan service to socially disadvantaged (SDA) groups, enhancing their ability to operate successfully. I'm pleased to report it's happening. I know that in the past we have been subject to criticism on our SDA service. But over the past few years, guided by strong civil rights laws and performance goals, FSA has made great strides toward improving loan availability to America's socially disadvantaged farmers.

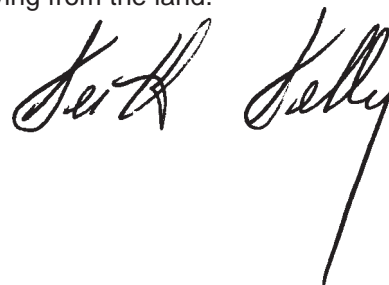
With 3,185 loans made nationally, 1998 stands out as an exceptional year for SDA loan activity, and represents a 19-percent increase over 1997. An overwhelming 42 state offices reported an increase in SDA loans. But these numbers don't really surprise me. It is indicative of the commitment of our employees to meet the needs of all of our customers. I commend our field people for this success. And in all of these states, outreach was key. Loan program employees worked aggressively to spur interest in our programs among minorities, women, and other underrepresented groups. Our employees did not wait for potential borrowers to come to them. They instead found inventive ways to find and interact with those who might benefit from our programs.

Oklahoma, for instance, dramatically raised their SDA loan activity from 152 in 1997 to 240 in 1998 by seeking out Native American, African American, and Hispanic groups, often with help from local colleges. County office staff had evening meetings with these groups to discuss FSA loans and distribute program information. In Utah, youth loans accounted for much of the increase from 33 loans in 1997 to 57 in 1998. Farm loan employees met with youths through FFA, 4H, and schools. Employees worked diligently with the young people to ensure success with loans, an effort that blossoms on its own once other youths see their peers' success. Utah is so skillful with this program that other states are looking to them for advice on increasing their own youth loan participation.

Throughout the country, FSA staff publicized informational meetings in newsletters and fliers. Employees set up exhibit booths and handed out Agency brochures and loan program fact sheets at county fairs and other public events. And they publicized our programs through the media, often using nontraditional sources like Spanish-language newspapers to advertise our loans and announce program news.

I am especially impressed that so many loan program folks put in extra effort, such as meeting after working hours with SDA groups on the groups' own turf — in churches, schools, community centers, and college campuses. This shows people that we believe in their potential for success and that our programs can help them succeed.

Equal access to loans continues to be a top priority during this Administration. I am greatly encouraged by our SDA loan achievements, but I believe we have more to do, especially with our guaranteed loans. Our continued outreach efforts give farmers and producers a positive, lasting impression of FSA. More importantly, it provides the opportunity to improve income levels and economic viability of SDA farming operations, safeguarding the original American dream of earning a decent living from the land.



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Holiday Greetings to all FSA Employees!

It's the holiday season again — a time that means many things to many people. The array of sparkling lights that turns neighborhoods into winter wonderlands. The rich aromas of specially prepared food. The serenity and peace of religious services. The exchange of gifts between loved ones. And so many other endeavors that make up this special time.

I want you to know that I appreciate all that you do for this Agency and for America's farmers, and I hope you will be able to spend some extra time with your family and friends, as we pause in our regular routine to give thanks for our blessings. This is a time of reverence and remembrance, a time of joy, sharing, and celebration. And New Year's Day is the day of hope and faith, when we put behind us the cares and problems of the old year and look ahead to the promise of the new.

This, I believe, is the essence of the holiday spirit. May it be at its fullest for each of you.



HURRICANE

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30 percent insured. Since the President declared Puerto Rico a disaster area, we were able to offer help through emergency loans, the Emergency Conservation Program, and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program.

We are encouraging farmers to file applications and are providing information on our emergency loans through radio, local newspaper, and TV ads. To date, FSA has received 1,925 EM, 7,370 ECP, and 2,271 NAP applications. Special FSA action teams from around the country flew in to help process the overload of applications, and to make site visits and help producers with other disaster assistance forms. In addition, FSA outreach staff visited all outreach program participants' farms to assess damages for possible disaster assistance and provide recommendations on restoring their farms. And, FSA's Kansas City Commodity Operations staff really came through for hurricane victims, sending them over one million pounds of food, including baby food and infant formula.

Heriberto Martinez, Puerto Rico's SED, was impressed with FSA employees' quick response. "So many employees were willing to give more than they could. Many disregarded their own situations to work long hours, even Saturdays and holidays."

In addition to FSA's help, HUD, FEMA, and other Federal entities are providing relief money and other aid. The local government has pledged to build 50,000 new homes for victims who lost their homes. And, a local marathon has raised \$11.5 million for the American Red Cross' relief efforts here.

The general consensus in Puerto Rico was thankfulness that, although Georges claimed many material possessions, most lives were spared. And with support from so many sources,

we look forward to a swift recovery. Everyone continues to pitch in to ensure that our island, known as the Shining Star of the Caribbean, will soon regain its luster.



Communication is difficult due to fallen phone lines and blocked roads.



The Puerto Rico Farm Bureau estimates \$40 million in losses to the island's poultry industry. Shown are damaged chicken houses.

New Space for California USDA Staff

USDA customers will soon be able to enjoy one-stop shopping in California. That's because in November, eight USDA agencies started moving to a single location — into Davis, Calif.'s new Richard E. Lyng Building. The building was named after former USDA Secretary Lyng, the only USDA Secretary from California. The \$15 million, three-story structure is the largest USDA building outside of Washington, D.C. and Kansas City, Mo.

The USDA-leased building houses FSA, Rural Development, Agricultural Research Service, Office of Inspector General, Food Safety and Inspection Service, Natural Resources Conservation Service, Risk Management Agency, and Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration. About 225 employees work in the building.

The new USDA building fulfills the California State Food and Agriculture Council's ten-year goal to locate as many USDA agencies together as possible. Their work made the massive undertaking a reality.

Amid ceremonial fanfare, the building opened on October 16. Among the crowd of more than 300 well-wishers gathered to dedicate the building, California USDA employees were honored to welcome USDA Secretary



Photo by Jeff Yasui

Hamburger Patty welcomes Secretary Glickman to Davis, Calif.

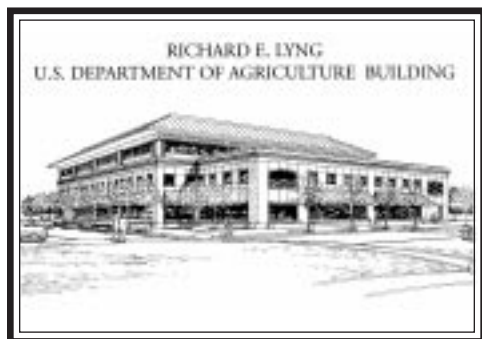
Glickman, former Secretary Lyng, and Deputy Secretary Rominger. The ceremony also drew California Congressman Vic Fazio, University of California at Davis' Chancellor Larry Vanderhoef, and California Secretary of Food and Agriculture Ann Veneman. When the Mayor of Davis, Julie Partansky, arrived on her quadri-cycle, the event was truly under way. And yes, even Hamburger Patty, the City of Davis' honorary mascot, was on hand for the festivities.

The U.C. Davis marching band warmed up the crowd. Then, amid autumn symbols of pumpkins and hay bales, the speakers wound their way through to watch the American flag rising for the first time over the building.

Congressman Vic Fazio, who was instrumental in bringing the agencies under one roof, spoke to the crowd. "This is the agricultural center for California," he said. "It's a great concept coming to fruition." Rominger added

that the building is a "symbol of unity among the community, agriculture, the university, and government." Secretary Glickman paid tribute to Lyng and his accomplishments as Secretary. "This building celebrates a great life in American agriculture. We're delighted to thank Mr. Lyng in this way," he said.

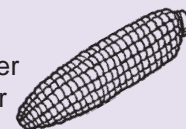
Lyng himself ended the program by saying, "It has been a great experience for me and my family to have been connected with agriculture all these years." And with that, Lyng unveiled a plaque dedicating the building. The ceremony speakers and the USDA agency directors then cut the ribbon and officially opened the building.



Line drawing of the Richard E. Lyng Building.

FOOD FACT:

An ear of corn never has an odd number of rows.



—Source: *The Food Files*

One Potato, Two Potato — Across the U.S.

by Trish Smith, Kansas; Christine Zeigler, Missouri; and Kathy Helgerson, South Dakota

FSA employees in Kansas, Missouri, and South Dakota found some resourceful ways to help end food waste and conquer one of America's most serious health problems — chronic hunger. Responding to USDA's ongoing food recovery effort, they collected surplus potatoes and distributed them to the hungry in their areas. And, of course, the compassionate farmers who donated the potatoes and helped with gleaning played a huge part in this effort.



photo by Rick Abel

In Kansas, potatoes rolled off a conveyor into containers loaded on a truck. FSA staff there helped distribute 45,000 pounds of spuds generously donated by one Missouri producer. Three CEDs coordinated the effort to load the potatoes onto a truck provided by the Army Reserve. Over 100 volunteers (FSA, NRCS, Extension Service, students, and others) sorted, bagged, and weighed the potatoes. They distributed them to 102 organizations such as food banks, senior citizen groups, and shelters in 27 Kansas counties. Local businesses helped out by donating the use of a produce warehouse, forklift, containers, and scales.



photo by Virginia Vernon

"Load them spuds!" — FSA volunteers in Missouri are shown loading a truck with 20,000 pounds of potatoes. In total, they collected over 142,000 pounds of spuds, gleaning them from just two farms in Atchison County. FSA helped box up the potatoes and haul them to surrounding Midwestern states, including Kansas, Iowa, and Nebraska. FSA donated the remaining 54,360 pounds to food banks and pantries throughout Missouri.



photo by Kathy Helgerson

FOOD FACT:

There are more than 1,000 chemicals in a cup of coffee.

—Source: *The Food Files*



A scene from the X-Files? No, it's sacks of gleaned potatoes in South Dakota waiting for loading. USDA employees, including many from FSA, came through by gleaning 11.5 tons of potatoes from the field in 1 1/2 days, not to mention 10.5 tons of watermelons and 900 pounds of apples. The National Guard donated the use of a 20-ton dump truck, a trailer, and fuel. And, several local businesses aided the effort by donating plastic bags for the potatoes and a hotel room for the FSA volunteer truck driver. The donations went to Indian reservations throughout the state.

USDA Women Take the Challenge

by Kaylyn Talbot, State Outreach Coordinator, Idaho

On September 19, 12 USDA women joined forces in Boise, Idaho with 19,000 others to be part of the Nation's largest gathering of women in a fitness event. This was the sixth year for the Idaho Women's Fitness Celebration, which has grown by nearly 4,000 participants each year since it began.

The three-day fund-raising celebration included a spirited expo and various 5K events like competitive and non-competitive walk/runs, a wheelchair event, and a child stroller-assisted competition. We're proud to say that Idaho's Team USDA, including ten women from FSA, joined forces with Federal Women's Program members to take first place in the government category.

The best thing about the celebration is that it included women of all backgrounds and ages. This year, for instance, 175 women were 70 years old or older. And, the stroller division gave mothers a chance to include their children in the event. The energy was electrifying, and as Boise Mayor Brent Coles called out, "There is power in numbers, and there is certainly a lot of power here!"

The women not only fostered power through the event, but also raised a lot of money for scholarships and local programs such as youth wheelchair sports camps, teen centers, and crime prevention projects. Since the event began in 1993, the women have raised over \$100,000.

For more information, check out the Idaho Women's Fitness Celebration website at www.celebrateall.org



Photo by Yvonne Rose

Idaho USDA women join up with Federal Women's Program members to win! Left to right: Debbie Chandler, FSA; Margie Iverson, FSA; Chris Redmon, daughter; Wendy Sexton, RD; Natasha Sexton, daughter; Susan Benton, FSA; Monta Green, FSA; Linda Swank, FSA; Leslie Dale, FSA; and Kaylyn Talbot, FSA. Not pictured: Sue Cenarrusa, FSA; and Beth Jensen, FSA.

Sandra Smith is One Super Supervisor!

Sandra Smith, Director, Executive Secretariat Staff, has been awarded the Association for Persons with Disabilities in Agriculture's Super Supervisor Award. She received her award at USDA's National Disability Employment Awareness Month Ceremony on October 6th. Janice Niven, one of Smith's employees, nominated Smith for her efforts to accommodate Niven's disability. This included redesigning Niven's position using flexiplace, modern technology, and other adaptations. The award cited Smith as a creative example in ensuring that all employees are given an equal opportunity to be productive and contributing workers.



Sandra Smith receives her award from APDA President Melvin Padgett.

About Smith, Niven said:

"My disability caught me by surprise. My ability to walk became more of a struggle every day. Sandy and I were co-workers at first, then she moved up. She suggested I try for offsite work and encouraged me to keep going even when it became really difficult for me to make it to work. When my application was denied because my work was not measurable and doable offsite, Sandy stepped in and arranged a detail to her staff. She helped me to learn to write correspondence and said she would see to it that flexiplace would work for me. Eventually, the three-hour commute each way was too much for me. Once again, Sandy stepped forward and arranged for me to work full-time from my home. She is the only supervisor who made an effort to help me by taking me on her staff. She is far more than a Super Supervisor. She's the best!"

FSA's Year 2000 Project

by Joyce Scott, Kansas City Management Office

The term "Are You Y2K OK?" is now probably pretty familiar to you. And for good reason, as it seeks to raise awareness and action on the Year 2000 problem.

What is the Y2K problem?

When computers were first introduced, data storage was expensive, so programmers saved money by reducing the amount of data that computers needed to operate. As a result, many computers use just the last two digits when keeping track of the year — "98" for "1998" for example. The Year 2000 problem, or "Y2K" as it is often referred to, means that in the coming millennium, many computers will recognize the double zero not as the year 2000, but as 1900. This glitch could cause them to stop running or to start generating false data.

Although understanding the Year 2000 issue is simple, fixing all the possible electronic devices and computers that have time mechanisms is a *monumental* undertaking. But be assured, FSA is doing its part to correct the problem.

Is FSA Y2K OK?

KCMO manages and tracks FSA's Y2K projects, including:

- all FSA computer hardware and vendor and custom-made software;
- administrative support equipment — FAX's, copying machines, programmable calculators;
- facility support mechanisms — security systems, automated heating/cooling control, fire prevention/suppression systems;
- scientific instrumentation;
- and telephone systems.

As of November 7, 98% of the software programs that are critical to the Agency's business are Y2K compliant. This is compared to just a year ago when FSA was 18% compliant. KCMO

accomplished this despite losing valuable information technology personnel. George Aldaya, Deputy Administrator for Management and FSA Y2K Executive Sponsor, recently recognized KCMO employees for their Y2K effort. In an October 21st ceremony, he presented KCMO working groups with plaques thanking them for their contributions.

FSA as a Y2K Leader and Communicator

FSA is recognized as a major problem solver in the Year 2000 battle. Private industry, municipal governments, and other Federal agencies are looking to us as a prototype, and adopting parts of our approach to Y2K compliance. Your bank may even be using our methodology to certify Y2K compliance of its facility and office systems. Also, since Y2K is a global issue, other countries have even contacted FSA for strategies.

FSA continues to increase awareness of the issue and share our best practices with the agribusiness community. Even though they may not own a PC, the Y2K problem may affect farmers using electrical and utility services; irrigation equipment and other farm machinery; and electronic equipment/devices used in refrigeration, assembly line production, and billing.

To inform our customers on actions they can take, FSA is establishing a Y2K website. FSA is also distributing a poster titled "Time is Running Out" to all field offices publicizing the website. And, an informational flier targeting small farm operations without computer access will be available at field offices. In addition, KCMO hosts the Kansas City Year 2000 Users Group, representing over 135 small and nationwide businesses, city governments, and Federal agencies. This group meets monthly to discuss and resolve Y2K issues.

How Does Y2K Affect You?

The Y2K problem does affect the average American because of our increased dependence on computers and automated systems. However, your local government, utility companies, grocers, bank, and post office most likely have the issue well under control. But if you have concerns, it doesn't hurt to ask your service providers if they are Y2K OK.

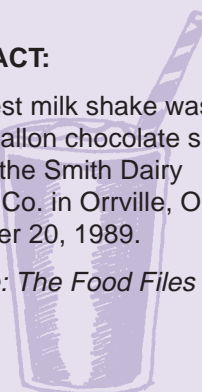
For questions on Y2K compliance of your own computer or other time-sensitive electronic equipment, you can count on several websites for some of the best information. The Y2K pages of the Federal Government's Chief Information Officers Council (www.itpolicy.gsa.gov/mks/yr2000/y2khome.htm) are a good starting place. The USDA Food Supply Working Group website (www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/y2k) and the Small Business Administration site (www.sba.gov/y2k) are also quite informative.

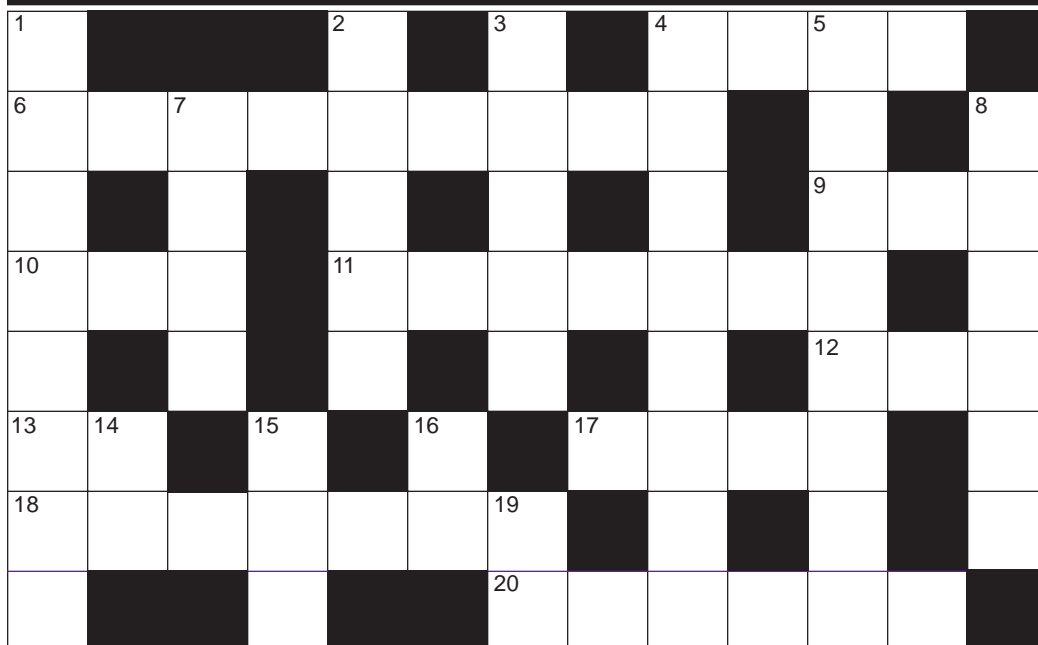
The Y2K problem has far-reaching effects — on a global scale. It is worth our while to note that as we are not an island, what happens to the global economy elsewhere will affect us. It is important that we all stay informed, do our part to raise Year 2000 awareness in our communities, and be prepared for the unexpected disruptions that may occur.

FOOD FACT:

The largest milk shake was a 1,575.2 gallon chocolate shake made by the Smith Dairy Products Co. in Orrville, Ohio on October 20, 1989.

—Source: *The Food Files*



DECEMBER FSA CROSSWORD**DOWN**

1. Fruit trees call these places home
2. Ideally, every day you should eat 6 to 11 servings of _____ products, 3 to 5 of vegetables, and 2 to 4 of fruits
3. The 4H Club improves head, heart, _____, and health
4. This state's most lucrative commodities are cattle, wheat, and broiler hens
5. Broad-leaved chicory
7. The best sources of this essential nutrient are lean red meat and seafood
8. Hand-held tool for cutting grass and grain
14. _____. Doolittle, friend to all animals
15. Brazil or filbert
16. A__IS
19. Rober__ Sprin__er, EDSO


ACROSS

4. Butter substitute made from animal oil, lard, and sometimes cottonseed oil
6. One wild hog
9. Finances FSA's commodity price and income support programs
10. ____ house
11. In the U.S., this state ranks tenth in crop cash receipts, with corn and soybeans as the top crops
12. Fungus can make crops _____
13. Rural community and housing helper
17. _____ism — sheep, horse, and cattle disease caused by eating a certain weed
18. It wilts your crops
20. There was much crop wilting in "The _____ of Wrath"

Answers to November's Puzzle

	B	A	N	A	N	A		E			C	T
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CALENDAR OF UPCOMING EVENTS

Date	Location	Event
December 2-3	Amarillo, Texas	Parks Shackelford, Associate Administrator; and Richard Newman, Deputy Administrator for Farm Programs; to attend Texas Wheat Producers Board Meeting
December 3	Great Falls, Mont.	Administrator Kelly to address the Montana Grain Producers Annual Convention
December 5-6	Houston, Texas	Vicki Hicks, Deputy Administrator for Commodity Operations, to attend Cotton Warehouse Association Meeting
December 7	Fort Worth, Texas	Parks Shackelford to attend National Grain and Feed Association Meeting
December 7-11	San Antonio, Texas	Administrator Kelly; Jim Kearney, Associate Administrator; Vicki Hicks; Carolyn Cooksie, Deputy Administrator for Farm Loan Programs; and Richard Newman to attend OIG Roundtable
January 1		 <i>Happy New Year!</i>

Note: The above is subject to change.